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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4172
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 9383
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 6280
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 4325
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3146
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9903
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 3240
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0341
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2317
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 6833
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4696
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001433

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: MONITORING MISSION RULES SECURITY
FORCES CULPABLE FOR EXECUTION OF 17 LOCAL STAFF OF FRENCH
NGO

REF: COLOMBO 1286 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: CDA James R. Moore for reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (C) The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) released a report on August 30 blaming Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) security forces for the execution-style murders of 17 Tamil employees of French NGO Action Against Hunger (Action Contre la Faim - ACF) on August 4 in Muttur, south of Trincomalee Harbor. The SLMM report prompted angry responses from Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) authorities, including Army Commander General Fonseka and Peace Secretariat head Palitha Kohona, who called the ruling "biased and unprofessional."

¶2. (C) Outgoing SLMM chief Swedish General Ulf Henricsson briefed co-chair representatives on August 31 about his decision on the ACF murders. The autopsy, he said, indicated that the staff members were killed on the morning of August 4, shortly after the ACF Colombo office last contacted the Trincomalee staff at approximately 6 AM. Henricsson said that reports from the SLMM monitors, media, and even military spokesperson Keheliya Rumbukwella indicated that the LTTE had pulled out of Muttur on the evening of August 3 and that GSL security forces were in control of the city center the following morning when the workers were killed. (Note: Subsequently, the military spokesman said that the Sri Lanka Army was not in control of Muttur on August 4. End note.) Henricsson also cited the GSL's refusal to allow monitors to enter Muttur on August 4, 5 and 6, as well as the "hasty burial" of the bodies as indications that security forces were trying to cover up the murders. He concluded that the perpetrators "could have been scared, tired soldiers, but that's not an excuse."

¶3. (C) Meanwhile, an Australian team requested by the GSL to provide ballistics expertise to the GSL's investigation into the Muttur NGO murders left Sri Lanka within days of arrival after authorities denied them access to the bodies or the crime scene. Australian DCM told poloff on August 30 that the GSL had hoped the Australian team would give their investigation credibility but was not willing to allow them to conduct an independent investigation. "Rather than allowing our team to accompany the exhumation and the

autopsies," Hyndes said, "they want to simply hand us the bullet casings for our 'technical expertise' only." The team will return, he added, if the Australian and Sri Lankan governments are able to reach an agreement on the Australian investigators' role.

¶4. (C) Charge' met with Chief of Defense Staff General Donald Perera on August 31 (septel). While dismissing the SLMM's ruling on the ACF killings as biased, Perera pointed out that those killed "were not foreigners, but local people." During the same meeting he alleged that local NGO staff working in Tamil areas were "purposefully planted and working for the LTTE."

¶5. (C) Comment: The SLMM's allegation that security forces were involved in the ACF murders could undermine international support of this government if it does not promptly launch a serious, independent investigation into the killings. The Embassy has stressed to senior GSL officials the importance of such an investigation on several occasions.

End comment.

MOORE